

Challenger School dedicates gazebo made by wood shop class to founding principal

By Mansi Patel

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STUART — About a hundred special needs students, school officials and staff gathered Friday afternoon at the garden at Challenger School to dedicate a recently completed gazebo to the school's founding principal.

A wood shop class of about thirty to forty students at the special needs school in Stuart spent the past two years constructing the 12-by-12 gazebo with a special handicap-accessible ramp that they finished making earlier this week.

"We built it as a place for the kids to seek peaceful refuge," said Harvey Cupaiuoli, the wood shop teacher at Challenger School who oversaw the construction. "It's built in a Japanese style and set in a beautiful garden."

The class decided to dedicate the structure to Susan Burrows, who was principal of Challenger School since it opened in 1989 and retired about two years ago.

"I was thrilled to see it, to say the least," Burrows said, whose name is written on a plaque on the crossbeam of the gazebo. "It was a lot of work to make it, and it makes it even more special. Don't be surprised if you see me sitting out here."

Burrows remains active with several non-profits, including Stuart-based mental health counseling non-profit Tykes & Teens, where she serves on the board of directors.

"She's remained on the forefront of advocating for children in Martin County," said Lauren Espitia, director of communication relations and development for Tykes & Teens.

The gazebo was originally an idea of a guidance counselor staff member at the school who applied for a grant to Education Foundation of Martin County.

It then became a collaboration between the Education Foundation of Martin County, Tykes & Teens, and the wood shop class, which also makes picnic tables for Martin County Parks and Recreation and the Martin County school system.

Other people recognized for their efforts included honorary Master Gardener volunteer Faith Haarala, who supervised the creation of the butterfly garden in 1990 with handicap-accessible, raised flower beds.

